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SITTING IN WITH TED ASHBY

Band With a History

D'AVINO

HANDSOME ALFONSO D'AVINO is arranging the 50th year of bookings for what he prefers to call "Boston's only traveling concert band." Conductor D'Avino still retains some of the musicians who comprised the 14-piece "Banda Ross" he first led at the Revere Beach amusement park when he was 17.

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D'AVINO is not disturbed by the fact that inventive genius has brought elaborate musical programs into his home. He points to the enthusiasm which prevails when a "live" band plays spirited music in open-air concert. Nothing equals it, he says. "The simplicity and charm of the band concert can be appreciated only when musicians and audience are visible," he put it.

★ ★ ★

THE BAND has been a Boston favorite almost since the still unwed leader stood before his mature musicians that hot afternoon at Revere. He can quickly summon 65 men right now. They might include Michael De Yeso, French horn; Victor Ferri, cornet, with him that first program.

★ ★ ★

OTHERS to be had are Chester Howard, trombone; Camille Santamaria, clarinet; Aaron Shapiro, cornet, and Alfred Ciambelli, also cornet, all with him at the beginning. Once he led a band of 400 musicians at Mechanics Building. It played his own arrangement of "Hymn to the Sun."

"WITHIN five years of that first Revere season," he reminisced, "the band, now 50 pieces, had engagements at Atlantic City, N. J., Newport, R. I., and cities in New England. We made a nationwide tour as 'Boston's Only Traveling Concert Band.' We've played Summer concerts on the Boston Common."

THE BAND conducted by the smiling, soft-spoken D'Avino was the major New England unit under the sponsorship of the Federal Music Project. He says it fits into a niche between the usual band and a symphonic orchestra. When it played at a public appearance for the late President Roosevelt, and chose a few Harvard numbers, it drew personal recognition from the President.

SON of Geovanni and Filomena D'Avino, Alfonso got his first musical instrument at 7. It was a cornet. In recent years he has ceasing playing it. Devotes all his time to study, conducting, composing. His father, a tailor, bought him the horn for 75 lira, then paid for lessons from Saverio Salemme at Naples.

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ASIDE FROM being one of the best-known and most popular bandsmen around, and once getting shot by a holdup man as he walked through the Fenway, D'Avino is newsworthy because of his mustache. It is one of the smallest in the world. By noteworthy dexterity, he keeps it neatly shaped himself with an old razor.

English High '06 Holds 49th Dinner on June 2

The Boston English High School class of '06 will hold its 49th annual get-together dinner Thursday night, June 2, at Warmuth's restaurant.

Swede Nelson will be guest speaker. Dr. A. Holtzman is president of the class and Charles Fox is secretary.

Afoot in Middlesex—XIV

2000 Curious Attend the Doctor's Funeral

(Another in a group of stories about Wilmington's "Lady of the Caskets.")

By WILLARD DE LUE

WILMINGTON—For nearly four hours, 2000 persons, men, women and children, stood around the home of the late Dr. Henry Hiller in Main st. and shivered in the bitter wind that swept over Wilmington in the afternoon of Nov. 11, 1888.

All had come with one thought in mind—to get into the house and see the doctor laid out in one of the princely caskets which Mrs. Hiller had designed for the occupancy of herself and her mate.

For years, Wilmington had talked of the massive burial cases of mahogany that were being adorned with strange carvings out in the cranberry house not far from the Miller residence. Newspapers had described them. And now the first to be completed was to be put to the use for which it had been intended.

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Before noon strangers were coming into Wilmington by carriage, cart and bicycle from places miles away. The afternoon train from Boston brought a small horde.

And as time came for services in the Hiller home (which is still here near the railroad station) the crowds swarmed around it. They tramped the dead grass of the broad lawns, laughed and joked as they strolled in the orchard and helped themselves to such apples as remained; they inspected the towering catafalque and its four black horses waiting nearby; they sat on fences and piazza railings, and probably would have attempted to invade the house itself save for the presence of three stalwart members of the Wilmington police force, Messrs. Connolly, McDermott and Mulkeen.

"When are we goin' to get in?" they demanded of the officers. "We'll freeze to death."

"When the services are over," it was explained.

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A few neighbors and friends had been admitted. Then the voices of the Silver Lake Quartet were heard in a hymn. It wouldn't be long now. There were prayers, readings and eulogies by local clergymen, Rev. William A. Thurston and Rev. Elijah Harmon, and the reading of Dr. Hiller's will by Squire Henry Ames, local grocer and justice of the peace.

Everything that Dr. Hiller possessed he left to his beloved wife, Dr. France B. Hiller. There were houses and lands here in town and in Wellfleet and Winchester, and the medical business in Boston from which the reputed great wealth of the Hillers had been derived.

"It is believed that the estate amounts to $3,000,000," a newspaper account of the funeral reported. It didn't. It was learned afterward that the "fortune" which Mrs. H. often mentioned didn't exist.

But it was good business to be highly prosperous, and Mrs. Dr. Hiller was understood to be a very good business-woman. Furthermore, it gained attention, and Mrs. Dr. Hiller liked attention. She used to go to Boston with her hands loaded with flashing jewels.

Mrs. Hiller lived at high tension; and so for a good part of her life she suffered from insomnia, for which her physicians (including Dr. Dan Buzzell of Wilmington) prescribed mild doses of opiates.

One of her nieces, Mrs. Laura McIntosh, long a resident of this town, testified in later years, when Mrs. Hiller's will was being contested, that her aunt sometimes took a few extra pills . . . and as a result, on two or three occasions, tried to climb the head of the bed under the impression that she was mountain-climbing.

She also said that Mrs. Hiller's unusual given names were part of the display that she enjoyed, and that her original maiden name was just Elizabeth Ayers.

But let's get back to Dr. Hiller's funeral, and the crowd milling around outside the house as the hours wore on and November's early dusk was approaching. It became colder and colder.

"This funeral will cause a lot more funerals," said one old woman as she drew her shawl around her shoulders.

Then came a stir. The side door was opened—and into the Hiller home the people trooped in a double line. There was the doctor in his wonderful casket, carved with death's-head, and flowers and dragons. He was almost buried in bushels of rosebuds and carnation blossoms that had been poured in around him.

For an hour and a half townsfolk and strangers streamed through the Hiller house. Then the doors were closed and there was another wait in the gathering dark as the massive funeral car was moved close to the side piazza.

A window was removed (the casket couldn't be maneuvered through the inner doors) and then slowly, carefully, 10 sturdy undertaker's assistants edged the 600-pound burden out to the piazza, got it over the rail, and with a mighty heave laid it on the catafalque which undertaker William L. Lockhart of Boston and Cambridge had prepared at a cost of $1100.

The huge, canopied funeral car was draped with 140 yards of the finest black broadcloth that money could buy.

Now the procession moved off, with a man in black walking at the head of each horse. About 100 carriages (most of them containing sightseers) followed the catafalque along the mile of Church st. to the cemetery. Hundreds dashed along beside the cortege to see the business to its end.

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At Wildwood a brick tomb had been rushed to completion in the previous days. Dr. Henry Hiller's demise had come too soon—too soon for the talked-of mausoleum to be ready for him, and too soon for his rich casket to be enclosed in a carved outer sarcophagus that was being made. A temporary case of 2-inch thick cedar boards had to do.

Thus, with curious crowds around, Dr. Henry Hiller was pushed into the brick tomb in the early darkness of a November afternoon.

The door was closed, the crowds went home, a night-watch was posted lest someone break in to steal the casket, and in a few days workmen covered the tomb with a high mound of earth.

Mrs. Hiller had been at the cranberry bog that morning. She was there next day. And in the cranberry-house work went ahead on the three remaining coffins.

NEXT—The end of the casket story.

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